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Press Release

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**ATTORNEY GENERAL MCGRAW TEAMS UP WITH
DATELINE NBC AND MORGANTOWN GRANNY
TO EXPOSE FRAUDULENT SALES PRACTICES
OF WATER SYSTEM DEALERS RESULTING IN
REFUNDS FOR HUNDREDS OF W. VA. CONSUMERS**

Last week nine million TV viewers saw Attorney General Darrell McGraw on Dateline NBC and heard him explain his successful strategy for combating fraudulent sales of water treatment systems in West Virginia: "Under our law [the manufacturer is] responsible for the activity of these people, and if you don't do something to remedy this, we're going to sue you for what they've done." During his interview, McGraw told NBC's Chief Consumer Correspondent Lea Thompson how his office "connected the dots" and held the manufacturers of expensive water treatment systems responsible for the wrongdoing of their "independent dealers" who sold the systems door-to-door to unsuspecting consumers through deceptive telemarketing, scare tactics, and unfounded claims about the benefits of the systems.

Today McGraw announced his office's latest settlement with Aquion Partners, manufacturer of RainSoft water treatment systems. Aquion, of Elk Grove Village, Illinois, agreed to offer full refunds to any West Virginia consumers who file complaints with the Attorney General's office by August 4, 2003, about the RainSoft systems they purchased from its now-defunct dealers, Advanced Water Solutions, Inc. of Greensburg, Pennsylvania, and The Only Way Water Treatment Company f/k/a CURE Water Treatment, Inc. of Buckhannon. More than 100 consumers have already complained about the RainSoft systems that typically sold for \$3,500 or more.

McGraw also honored Shirley L. Jones, a Morgantown great-grandmother, as a "consumer protection hero" for her role in the undercover investigation by McGraw and Dateline that produced dramatic hidden camera proof that some dealers were making outrageous unfounded claims about the benefits of their systems. Ms. Jones, who works as a part-time receptionist for West Virginia Senior Legal Aid in Morgantown, posed as a potential buyer and invited various dealers to give sales presentations in her home.

Jones captured Ed Wise of now-defunct Crystal Clear Water, a former Kinetico dealer, claiming that his system could protect her from bio-terrorism because it could "completely take out arsenic" from her system. He also scared her by explaining that mustard gas had been used as a "killing tool" in World War II and was a component of chlorine, which his system could remove. She also captured "Rick," a salesman for former RainSoft dealer, Advanced Water Solutions, Inc., claiming that his system would protect her from "chlorine gas," stuff that "will kill you," and "anthrax."

Attorney General McGraw explained, "We started this investigation a few years ago after learning to our dismay that overpriced water treatment systems were being sold door-to-door and put on credit cards, thereby saddling unsuspecting West Virginia consumers with mountains of debt that they could not pay in their lifetimes. This was the same objectionable financing program that we tried to halt in our investigation of the door-to-door sale of C-Band satellite dish systems in the mid 1990s.

"Later, we learned that the 'bogus' credit card financing was just the tip of the iceberg. We discovered that independent dealers of well-known manufacturers of water treatment systems were gaining entrance to homes of unsuspecting consumers through telemarketers promising 'free water tests.' Once in their homes, these salespersons misled consumers about the quality of their water, made unfounded claims about the health benefits of the systems, and shamelessly scared consumers by claiming that their systems could remove arsenic and anthrax from water supplies in the event of bio-terrorism attacks.

"Our office set out to permanently change the way these systems are sold in West Virginia and, with the help of Dateline NBC and our 'consumer protection hero,' Shirley L. Jones of Morgantown, we have reached that goal."

Any West Virginia consumers who purchased water treatment systems from Advanced Water Solutions or Only Way/CURE who believe they have been wronged and want a refund for their systems must file a written complaint with the Attorney General's office by September 4, 2003. Complaint forms may be obtained by calling the Attorney General's toll-free Consumer Protection Hot Line, 1-800-368-8808.

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